



MARKET RESEARCH · DENTAL PATIENTS

WHAT DENTAL PATIENTS ASK, SEARCH AND FEAR, AND HOW PRACTICES **WIN** THEM.

A deep dive into people choosing a dentist: emergencies, cleanings, implants, crowns, root canals, braces and aligners, cosmetic work, kids, insurance and the cost of it all. Their questions, where they look for answers, who wins those searches today, and the gaps a dental practice can build on.

28,679

dental keywords measured

29.5M

US Google searches a month

1,073

Google FAQ questions collected

143,232

Reddit posts classified

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NOBODY OWNS THE DENTAL PATIENT.

Dental demand is large, local and split across hundreds of thousands of practices. No brand, chain or directory holds more than 5% of the visibility on Google. Patients arrive worried about pain, money and the chair itself, and most of what they read was written by someone other than a dentist.

29.5M

US Google searches a month across dental needs

\$266M

a month in Google click value across those searches

1 IN 3

adults had no dental exam or cleaning in the past year (CDC, 2025)

72.6%

of US adults say they are afraid of going to the dentist (JADA, 2025)

Seven things the data says

1. **Money is the question behind almost every visit.** 3.17M searches a month (10.7% of all dental demand) carry price, insurance, coverage or financing words. Cost and insurance is the largest topic in Google's "People also ask" boxes, with 269 of 1,073 questions. "How do I fix my teeth if I don't have money?" shows on 11 of the 150 result pages we pulled.
2. **Search is wide open.** 906 individual practice and other sites split 61% of the rank-weighted visibility. The biggest single site is Reddit at 4.8%, then Cleveland Clinic (4.6%), Aspen Dental (3.1%) and Delta Dental (2.6%).
3. **Google answers with AI first.** 78% of the dental result pages show an AI answer, and 1,345 of 1,354 "People also ask" answers are AI-written with no named source page. YouTube is the most-cited source inside those answers (52 of 117), ahead of Cleveland Clinic (34) and Reddit (22).
4. **Pain brings people in, and fast.** Toothache, swelling and infection is the largest Reddit topic (43,049 posts). Emergency and same-day searches cost \$14.50 a click. "toothache ibuprofen" is up 814% on last year, and a map listing shows on half of the emergency searches.
5. **Fear is the most intense theme and the least served.** Posts about dental fear score 3.21 out of 5 for intensity, the highest of 33 pain points. Sedation and anxiety searches are small (87K a month) but up 30.5% on last year.
6. **Trust breaks on upselling and bad work.** 1,171 posts describe feeling pushed into unneeded treatment and 2,853 describe work that failed or had to be redone. The result page for "is aspen dental good" has five forum results in its top 10.
7. **On the map, reviews are table stakes.** In 21 metros the median dentist in the top 20 map results has 312 Google reviews and a 4.8 rating, and two in three are rated 4.8 or higher. Stars no longer separate practices; volume of reviews and visible proof do.

The play in one line: Win the map and the price question. Publish real prices and payment options, answer the pain, fear and "is this normal" questions on video and in plain text, make same-day care easy to book, and give patients a reason to trust the plan before they sit in the chair.

WHO THE DENTAL PATIENT IS

66.7%

of adults had a dental exam or cleaning in the past year (CDC NHIS, 2025)

13%

reported cost barriers to dental care, against 4–5% for other care (ADA HPI, 2023)

13%

of Americans have no dental coverage at all (NADP, 2025)

26.8%

of US adults report severe dental fear, on top of 45.8% with moderate fear (JADA, 2025)

BIGGEST VOLUME

THE PAIN-NOW PATIENT

Toothache, swelling, a broken tooth or a crown that fell off. Searches "emergency dentist", "dentist open Saturday" and "can you go to the ER for a toothache". Wants a slot today and a price before they come in. **Needs:** same-day access, a clear first-visit price, and calm instructions until they arrive.

HIGHEST VALUE

THE QUOTE-IN-HAND PATIENT

Has a treatment plan for a crown, root canal, deep cleaning or implants and wants to know if it is fair. Median dollar figure in implant posts is \$3,378; in denture posts, \$3,000. Weighs CareCredit, dental schools and Mexico. **Needs:** a straight price, insurance math done for them, and a second opinion they trust.

UNDER-SERVED

THE FEARFUL AVOIDER

Has not been in years, is embarrassed about their teeth, and expects to be judged. Shame posts mention a median of \$3,800; fear posts score the highest intensity of any theme. **Needs:** sedation options, a no-lecture first visit, and proof that people like them came back.

LONG JOURNEYS

STRAIGHTENERS AND REPLACERS

Braces and aligner patients (the second-largest Reddit theme) live with trays, refinements and retainers for years. Implant and denture buyers make the biggest dental purchase of their lives, at the highest click costs in the data. Parents look for pediatric dentists who take Medicaid. **Needs:** honest timelines, total-cost estimates and support between visits.

Where they research

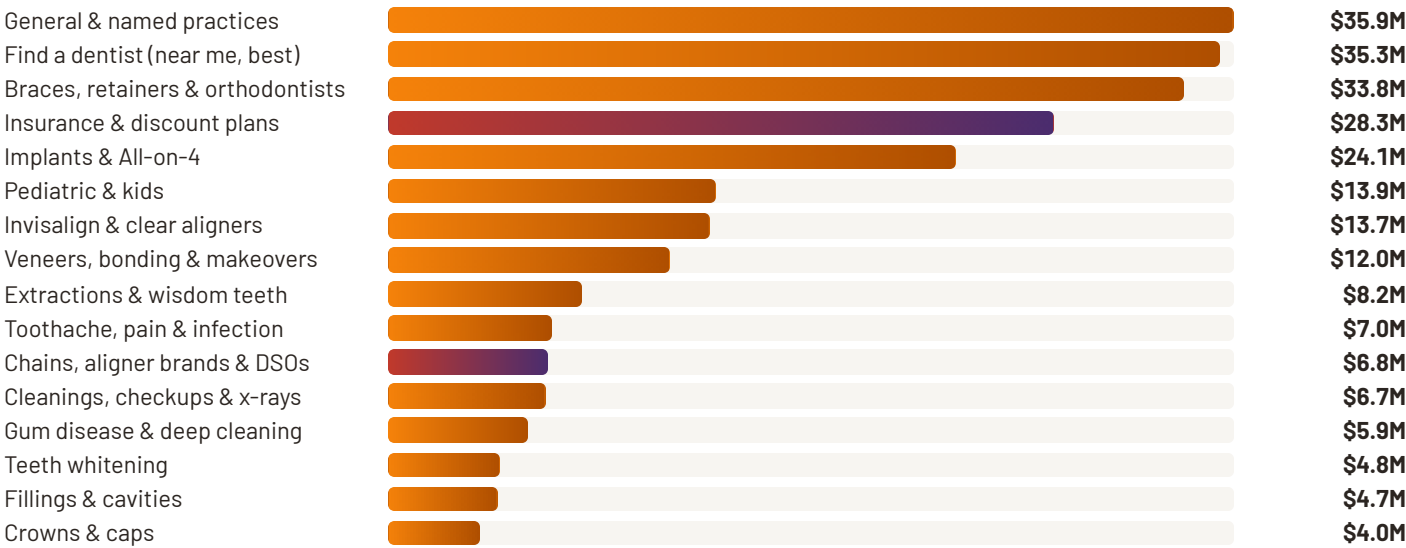
CHANNEL	WHAT IT'S USED FOR	EVIDENCE
Google search and Maps	Finding a dentist, prices, insurance	"dentist near me" alone gets 1.83M searches a month; map listings show on 28% of the 150 result pages and 50% of emergency searches
Google AI answers	Symptoms, costs, "is this normal"	AI answer on 117 of 150 pages; 1,345 of 1,354 "People also ask" answers are AI-written
Their own dentist	What to do next	"my dentist / hygienist / orthodontist said" is the most common source phrase in posts and comments (7,022)
Reddit	Second opinions, recovery, quotes	Reddit is in the top 10 on 52 of 150 result pages; named as a source 3,186 times in posts and comments
YouTube	Procedures, aligner and braces life	The most-cited source in Google's AI answers (52 of 117); 2,112 videos ranked across 30 dental YouTube searches
AI assistants	Second opinions on a diagnosis or quote	ChatGPT and other AI named 224 times in posts and comments, small but present

Sources: CDC NCHS FastStats, dental (NHIS 2025 early release); ADA Health Policy Institute, National Trends in Dental Care Use, Dental Insurance Coverage, and Cost Barriers (September 2024); NADP 2025 Dental Benefits Report; JADA dental fear study (September 2025) via ADA News. Channel evidence is from this study's search and Reddit data.

WHERE THE SEARCHES AND THE MONEY ARE

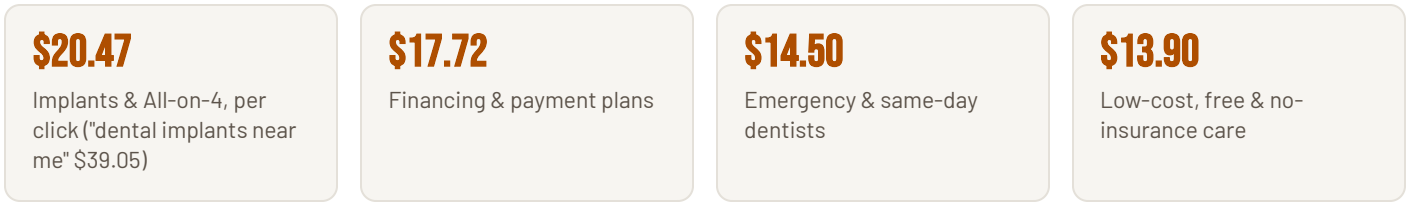
28,679 US keywords, grouped into 15,309 distinct searches so close variants aren't counted twice. Total: about 29.5M searches a month, worth about \$266M a month in ad clicks. Click value is volume times cost per click. It ranks where advertisers spend; it isn't a revenue forecast.

Monthly click value by category (top 16)



Purple bars mark the paying and comparing side of the decision (insurers, discount plans, chains and aligner brands), where the patient is choosing who pays or who treats rather than searching for a procedure. "General" is mostly "dentist" (1M a month) and named local practices.

Where the clicks cost the most



By stage of the patient journey

STAGE	SEARCHES / MO	CLICK VALUE / MO	AVG CPC
Find & choose (near me, kids, sedation, chains)	4.8M	\$56.8M	\$11.76
Straighten (braces, aligners, retainers)	4.1M	\$47.5M	\$11.58
Research (dentist, dental, named practices)	3.9M	\$35.9M	\$9.26
Pay (insurance, financing, low-cost, abroad)	4.6M	\$32.8M	\$7.08
Replace teeth (implants, dentures, bridges)	2.0M	\$29.4M	\$14.37
Repair (crowns, root canals, fillings, extractions)	2.5M	\$19.2M	\$7.54
Cosmetic (veneers, bonding, whitening)	2.6M	\$16.7M	\$6.45
Urgent (pain, infection, broken, emergency)	2.2M	\$12.5M	\$5.81
Maintain (cleanings, exams, x-rays)	480K	\$6.7M	\$14.04
Gums (gum disease, deep cleaning)	1.2M	\$5.9M	\$4.87

THE EASIEST MONEY ON THE TABLE

These searches have high value and low competition: keyword difficulty 20 or under (out of 100), buyer or local intent, no brand or chain names. 1,344 searches pass these filters; these are the top 15, at most two per category.

#	KEYWORD	SEARCHES / MO	CPC	DIFFICULTY	CLICK VALUE / MO	PEAK
1	kids dentist near me	90,500	\$14.05	18	\$1,271,525	Sep
2	remove wisdom teeth dentist	74,000	\$14.63	5	\$1,082,620	Dec
3	cosmetic dentist near me	74,000	\$14.22	4	\$1,052,280	Sep
4	dentist cavity	90,500	\$10.28	14	\$930,340	Oct
5	teeth cleaning near me	49,500	\$17.77	0	\$879,615	Apr
6	braces near me	40,500	\$20.43	2	\$827,415	Jan
7	bridge dental cost	60,500	\$12.30	0	\$744,150	Jan
8	permanent orthodontic retainer	27,100	\$25.88	0	\$701,348	Sep
9	teeth whitening near me	60,500	\$10.68	0	\$646,140	Sep
10	dental crown cost	74,000	\$8.29	0	\$613,460	Jan
11	financing dental implant	22,200	\$26.78	16	\$594,516	Mar
12	porcelain veneers dentists	49,500	\$9.77	1	\$483,615	Jan
13	dentist dental implants	14,800	\$31.27	20	\$462,796	Oct
14	dental er near me	27,100	\$16.95	11	\$459,345	Sep
15	dental appointment	22,200	\$20.51	20	\$455,322	Sep

Difficulty is DataForSEO's national score. For "near me" searches the real contest is the local map pack, covered in section 06.

Rising fast (up 50% or more on last year)

IMPLANTS NEAR HOME

"dental implants near me" is up 123% to 110K a month at \$39.05 a click, the most expensive click in the top 50. "consultation for dental implants" is up 235% at \$41.38.

PAIN, HANDLED AT HOME FIRST

"toothache ibuprofen" is up 814% to 60.5K a month. "over the counter dental pain relief" (+173%), "advil for toothache" (+404%) and "cold compress toothache" (+326%) climbed with it.

COSMETIC AND COMFORT, LOCALLY

"cosmetic dentist near me" (+83%, 74K) and "teeth whitening near me" (+83%, 60.5K) are rising. Sedation and anxiety searches as a group are up 30.5%, and "custom night guard for teeth grinding" is up 234%.

Also rising: "dental plan ppo" (+309%), "dentist for cracked tooth" (+83%), "removable dentures" (+650%) and "paediatric orthodontist" (+174%). 223 clusters meet the bar; 509 clusters are down 40% or more. Most categories are flat to slightly down: crowns are down 24%, bridges 20%, gum disease 15%.

THE DENTAL YEAR: WHEN TO PUSH WHAT

Each cell shows that month's search volume against the category's own average (1.0 = average). Darker means busier. Dental demand is steady compared with most local services: the whole market moves only 1.3x from its busiest month (January) to its quietest (June). The swings that do exist line up with insurance years, school calendars and summer.

CATEGORY	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Financing & payment plans	1.13	1.09	1.25	1.26	.93	.56	.61	.58	1.27	1.16	1.11	1.04
Sedation & dental anxiety	1.00	.86	1.03	.95	.93	1.08	1.27	1.20	1.09	.94	.82	.82
Veneers, bonding & makeovers	1.25	1.04	1.13	.99	.89	.81	.85	.86	1.20	1.04	.93	1.00
Insurance & discount plans	1.26	1.03	1.12	1.02	.93	.86	.83	.84	1.04	1.06	1.01	1.00
Pediatric & kids	1.23	.98	1.09	1.00	.87	.91	1.06	1.07	1.13	.99	.81	.86
Low-cost & no-insurance care	1.09	1.05	1.21	1.11	.92	.81	.99	.93	1.22	1.00	.82	.86
Gum disease & deep cleaning	1.15	.95	1.07	1.04	.86	.84	.86	.91	1.22	1.14	1.02	.94
Teeth whitening	1.18	1.07	1.12	1.08	.91	.81	.88	.88	1.14	.98	.97	.97
Crowns & caps	1.18	1.14	1.23	1.10	.93	.92	.91	.89	.94	.96	.88	.93
Implants & All-on-4	1.11	1.04	1.16	1.05	.94	.83	.97	.97	1.16	1.05	.84	.88
Dentures & partials	1.15	1.03	1.10	1.09	.93	.82	.86	.93	.99	1.09	.98	1.02
Broken & chipped teeth	1.14	.96	1.00	.92	.90	.83	.90	1.13	1.07	1.04	1.03	1.08
Invisalign & aligners	1.18	1.02	1.05	1.00	.90	.88	.96	.92	1.07	1.10	.97	.94
Cleanings & checkups	1.11	.95	1.02	1.06	.95	.86	.90	1.03	1.14	1.10	.96	.92
Emergency & same-day	1.01	.90	1.08	1.11	1.04	.91	1.00	.97	1.09	1.02	.93	.93
Extractions & wisdom teeth	1.04	.90	1.08	1.03	.96	1.01	1.06	1.06	.99	.98	.91	.99
All dental demand	1.16	1.00	1.09	1.03	.92	.89	.93	.97	1.06	1.03	.94	.98

JAN - MAR

New insurance year. Insurance (1.26x) and veneers (1.25x) peak in January; crowns, financing and implants climb into March.

APR - MAY

Financing peaks again in April (1.26x). Cleanings hold steady. A good window for treatment-plan follow-ups before summer.

JUN - AUG

The quiet stretch: all demand dips to 0.89x in June, financing falls to 0.56x. Sedation (1.27x in July) and wisdom teeth run against the trend.

SEP - DEC

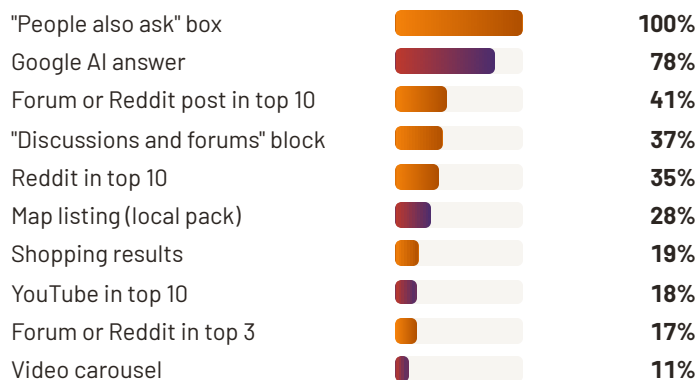
September restarts everything: financing 1.27x, gums and low-cost care 1.22x, veneers 1.20x. Fillings peak in October. Unused benefits and year-end planning carry into December.

Seasonality uses spike-cleaned monthly data: 1,102 keywords had a single month at 3x or more their typical level (476 of them in September 2025), and those months were replaced with the keyword's median. Some September strength may still be inflated by the same artifact.

WHO WINS DENTAL ANSWERS ON GOOGLE TODAY

We ran 150 dental searches across the whole patient journey, from "toothache" to "all on 4 dental implants cost", and recorded everything on each result page. No one owns dental search: the visibility is split across hundreds of practice sites, a few health publishers, insurers, Reddit and one big chain.

What shows up on the page (share of 150 result pages)



By topic: map listings show on 50% of emergency and cosmetic searches and 43% of anxiety searches, but on none of the 13 pain and symptom searches, where an AI answer showed every time. Forum blocks show on 75% of gum searches, 71% of anxiety searches and 67% of kids' searches.

Share of visibility (weighted by rank)

SITE	SHARE	#1 SPOTS	AI ANSWER CITES
reddit.com	4.8%	10	22
clevelandclinic.org	4.6%	15	34
aspendental.com (chain)	3.1%	8	19
deltadental.com (insurer)	2.6%	4	19
yelp.com	2.2%	5	3
carecredit.com (financing)	1.6%	3	10
mayoclinic.org	1.4%	4	12
youtube.com	1.3%	0	52
invisalign.com	1.1%	3	4
zocdoc.com	1.0%	3	1
mouthhealthy.org (ADA)	0.9%	2	14
906 practice and other sites	61.3%	–	–

By type: practices and other sites 61.3%, health publishers and .gov/.edu 14.5%, insurers and financing 7.1%, forums 6.0%, chains and brands 5.0%, directories 4.5%, video 1.5%.

What this means: Google showed no classic featured snippet on any of the 150 pages. Of 1,354 "People also ask" answers, Google's AI wrote 1,345 with no named source page. A practice now gets quoted by being a source the AI already trusts: a dentist on video, a clear page that a hospital-style publisher would write, or an answer that reads like real patient experience. A thin service page will not get quoted.

Where forums hold the top spots and no practice has a good answer yet

On 73 of 150 result pages, forums hold 2 or more top-10 spots, a top-3 spot, or a "Discussions and forums" block. Those pages carry 563 of the 1,073 questions. The most forum-heavy: **best dental insurance** (4 forum results), **is aspen dental good** (5), are dental implants worth it, are veneers worth it, Invisalign vs braces, is deep cleaning necessary, dental insurance with no waiting period, emergency dentist with no insurance, low cost dentist near me and root canal cost.

"emergency dentist" searches are full of call-routing lead-gen. 1800dentist.com, 247localdentist.com, emergencydentistsusa.com and listings named "Emergency Dental Service" or "Urgent Care Dentist 24/7" show in both the results and the map pack, routing calls to whichever office pays. A real practice with real same-day hours can outrank them.

THE QUESTIONS DENTAL PATIENTS ASK MOST

On Google ("People also ask")

Number of dental result pages (out of 150) where each question appeared. A celebrity question and repeat phrasings are left out.

QUESTION	PAGES
What is the 3-3-3 dental rule?	21
Which teeth usually rot first?	15
What is the most feared dental procedure?	12
How do I fix my teeth if I don't have money?	11
What are the new dental charges for 2026?	11
Can you stop teeth rotting once they start?	9
What destroys teeth the most?	9
What does tooth sepsis feel like?	7
What is the 2-2-2 rule for teeth?	7
What is the dentist 2-year rule?	7
What's the worst tooth to get pulled out?	7
Do any dental plans cover 100%?	6
Is it worth getting dental implants at 70?	6
Why is my root canal \$3,000?	6
Can a dentist pull a rotten, broken tooth?	5
What is the downside of a dental implant?	5
Can a tooth rot under a crown?	4
Cost to remove all teeth and get dentures?	4
Is insurance cheaper than paying out of pocket?	4
What will the ER do for tooth pain?	4

1,073 unique questions in total. By topic: cost and insurance 269, emergency and pain 184, restorative 164, gums and cleanings 98, implants and dentures 81, cosmetic 74, orthodontics 67, anxiety and sedation 47, choosing a dentist 40.

On Reddit (143,232 posts, 12 communities)

Ranked by a demand score that combines question posts on Reddit (75%) and Google autocomplete (25%).

QUESTION	POSTS
Braces or Invisalign, and is my case normal?	20,824
Should I get my wisdom teeth out?	11,559
Is my jaw pain TMJ, and do night guards help?	6,577
Is this tooth pain normal, or do I need a dentist now?	5,014
Is this an infection, and do I need antibiotics?	5,887
Veneers, bonding or whitening for my budget?	2,268
What are dentures really like?	3,934
Is this a cavity, and can it heal or wait?	3,777
Do I have to wear a retainer forever?	5,166
Is this dry socket? What can I eat?	4,694
Do I really need a root canal, or just pull it?	2,722
How do I get over fear of the dentist?	4,034
Do I need a crown, and why is it so expensive?	2,189
Are implants or All-on-4 worth the money?	1,924
My dentist messed up: what are my options?	4,002
Implant, bridge or denture: which one?	2,822
Which toothbrush, toothpaste or flosser?	2,745
Why are my teeth yellow, and what works?	2,383
Do I really need a deep cleaning?	838
I chipped or broke a tooth: what now?	2,131

Of the 143,232 posts, 65% are questions (92,759). Where the stage could be told: 12,865 after a procedure, 8,288 shopping for care, 7,155 mid-treatment, 3,481 uninsured or low income, 1,602 parents.

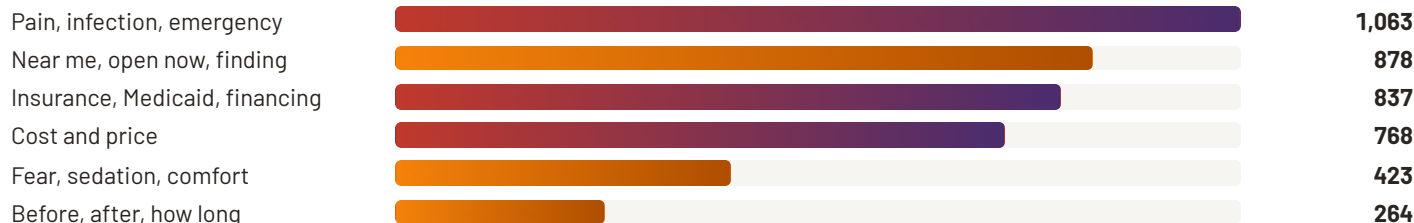
Top questions on Google by search volume

What do dental caries look like (60.5K a month) · How long will a root canal take (33.1K, \$16.62 a click) · How much does it cost to do braces (33.1K) · How much is Invisalign (33.1K) · What are veneers (33.1K) · How expensive are braces (27.1K) · How expensive are veneers (27.1K) · What is a crown for teeth (27.1K) · How much are dental implants (22.2K) · How do you stop a toothache fast (14.8K) · How long does a cavity filling take (14.8K). 3,360 question clusters in total, worth 2.25M searches a month.

WHAT PEOPLE TYPE INTO GOOGLE

We ran 1,134 Google autocomplete lookups: 42 dental topics, each on its own and followed by every letter from a to z. That returned 9,292 unique dental suggestions (plus 6,237 from YouTube autocomplete). They show the exact words people type, before they see a single result.

What the suggestions are about (unique Google suggestions)



Some suggestions fall under more than one theme. Cost and insurance together (1,605) outnumber pain. The free autocomplete endpoint is not tied to a US city, so some suggestions name places outside the US; the examples below are national ones.

URGENT

PAIN RIGHT NOW

emergency dentist open today · emergency dentist without insurance · emergency dentist payment plan · emergency dentist that takes medical · can a dentist extract an infected tooth · no dental insurance tooth infection · can a dentist fix a chipped tooth · dental urgent care near me

MONEY

EVERY PRICE QUESTION

dental cost without insurance · deep cleaning teeth cost · dental implant cost average · dental bone graft cost · dental cost of filling · dental cost mexico vs usa · braces in tijuana cost · cheap dentist near me for tooth extraction

COVERAGE

"WILL THEY TAKE MY PLAN?"

dental insurance no waiting period · dental insurance for implants · dental implants with medicaid · dental financing for people with bad credit · braces near me payment plan · dental insurance emergency · best dentist near me that accepts medicaid · cheap dentist with payment plans near me

FEAR

"CAN YOU KNOCK ME OUT?"

sedation dentist near me · best dentist for anxiety near me · scared of dentist needle · fear of dentist help · dental sedation cost · sedation dentistry for adults · pediatric dentist with sedation near me · sedation teeth cleaning near me

RECOVERY

"IS THIS NORMAL AFTER?"

tooth extraction recovery time · why does my tooth hurt after a filling · tooth hurts years after root canal · how long dental numbing wear off · tooth extraction pain after 3 days · wisdom teeth recovery timeline · why is my tooth loose after a root canal

CHOOSING

FINDING THE RIGHT OFFICE

best dentist near me · dentist near me accepting medicaid · dentist near me adults · best dentist for kids · cheap dentist clinic near me · best dentist and orthodontist near me · deep cleaning teeth near me

What this adds to the plan: patients type their constraint before they type the treatment: "without insurance", "payment plan", "takes medicaid", "open today", "for anxiety". Every service page should answer those words directly: who you take, what it costs without insurance, how fast you can see them, and whether they can be sedated. "emergency dentist payment plan" and "sedation teeth cleaning near me" are single searches, so pairing urgent care with financing, and cleanings with sedation, matches how people already ask.

WHAT HURTS DENTAL PATIENTS MOST

We ranked 33 pain points by how often they come up and how upset people are (intensity is scored 1–5 from the words they use). Sources: 143,232 Reddit posts and 11,823 top comments on the 1,500 most-discussed question threads. Jaw pain, infections and recovery come up most; fear, shame and upselling carry the most emotion.

#	PAIN POINT	POSTS	COMMENTS	INTENSITY	TYPICAL \$	IN THEIR WORDS (PARAPHRASED)
1	Jaw pain, clicking and grinding (TMJ)	6,978	272	2.0	\$1,500	Years of jaw pain and headaches with no clear answer.
2	Toothache, swelling or infection with no quick appointment	5,269	95	2.3	\$1,300	Infected tooth, swelling, and the night spent in the ER.
3	Dry socket and painful extraction recovery	6,096	48	2.0	\$1,200	Day five after wisdom teeth and it is getting worse, not better.
4	Botched or failed work: redo, refund	2,853	115	2.1	\$1,300	Crowns fit poorly and the office refuses a refund.
5	Aligner trays not tracking, endless refinements	4,249	260	1.4	\$3,500	Four years in and on a fourth round of refinements.
6	Shame about the state of their teeth	2,224	105	2.5	\$3,800	A dentist's comment about their smile stuck with them for months.
7	Dental fear keeps people away	1,593	26	3.2	\$3,500	First visit in 15 years, and they cried in the chair.
8	Pain after a filling, crown or root canal	2,395	25	2.0	\$1,200	Filling replaced twice and it hurts worse each time.
9	Bleeding, receding gums, fear of losing teeth	2,498	92	1.7	\$2,450	Told periodontitis is so bad that regular dentures may not work.
10	Denture fit, pain, learning to eat and talk	2,050	108	1.8	\$3,000	Left the reline appointment in tears because they still don't fit.
11	Feeling upsold into unneeded treatment	1,171	95	2.5	\$1,221	A routine cleaning ended with a pitch for a night guard and a bill.
12	Braces pain, broken brackets, poking wires	1,458	60	1.8	\$500	A bracket broke off and took a chunk of tooth with it.
13	Stained or yellow teeth hurting confidence	1,771	32	1.5	\$860	Aligner attachments turned yellow within days.
14	Can't afford care, no insurance, skipping it	1,287	41	1.9	\$1,100	Abscess, no insurance, and the office wants payment before X-rays.
15	Quote shock: plans far higher than expected	1,256	95	1.8	\$2,000	An emergency visit turned into a five-figure treatment plan.
16	Long waits for appointments and referrals	1,011	25	1.9	\$1,500	Every dentist in a new town is booked out for months.

MONEY AND TRUST THEMES

Posts name real numbers: a median of \$1,800 when cost comes up, \$2,875 in aligner posts, \$3,378 in implant posts and \$4,000 in dental tourism posts. Patients ask whether a quote is fair, whether insurance math was done right, and whether a deep cleaning or night guard was really needed. 448 posts carry distrust of chain offices, and 375 describe the struggle to find a dentist who takes Medicaid.

WHAT PATIENTS LEAN ON

Most posts start from "my dentist said", and most answers on Reddit come from other patients. Products with clear positive talk: Waterpik (+63 net), Sensodyne (+81), IV sedation (+55) and dental school clinics (+57) as a lower-cost route. CareCredit is mixed (–20, small sample). Invisalign dominates the conversation (14,237 mentions) at +49 net.

"Wish I knew" (patient consensus, paraphrased): wear the retainer, for good. Use an orthodontist, not a general dentist, for aligners. Ask up front about attachments, refinements and what retainers cost. Get the after-care instructions before the numbing kicks in. Go sooner; waiting made it worse and costlier. Where they look: their dentist (7,022 mentions), Reddit (3,186), Google and Google reviews (1,640), TikTok and Instagram (348), YouTube (292), friends and family (258), ChatGPT and AI (224).

WHAT PATIENTS TALK ABOUT, AND WHO WINS VIDEO

Most-mentioned names on Reddit

Mentions across posts and top comments. Net sentiment is positive mentions minus negative, as a share of those that took a side; shown only where 10 or more took a side.

BRAND OR SERVICE	MENTIONS	NET
Invisalign	14,237	+49
Listerine and mouthwash	1,830	+41
Waterpik / water flossers	712	+63
IV sedation	642	+55
Dental school clinics	590	+57
Nitrous / laughing gas	541	+22
Vivera retainers	422	+45
Medicaid / CHIP / Denti-Cal	366	+22
All-on-4 / full-arch	357	+60
Affordable Dentures & Implants	313	+43
Aspen Dental	296	+44
Delta Dental	264	+22
Sensodyne	260	+81
Zirconia crowns	194	+73
ChatGPT / AI	193	+76
CareCredit	110	-20

Sentiment is read from word cues in the sentence that names the brand, so small samples swing. Chains get more mixed talk than the numbers suggest: the Aspen sample is 50 sided mentions, and its own Google result page is led by Reddit threads asking whether it is any good.

Who wins dental YouTube searches

2,112 videos from 30 dental YouTube searches. "Top-3" counts how often a channel ranked in the first three results.

CHANNEL	TOP-3	RESULTS
Teeth Talk Girl (dental hygienist)	15	124
The Bentist	5	105
Dr. Joyce Kahng	3	43
Nuvia Dental Implant Center	3	37
Doctor O'Donovan	3	7
Truly Dental	2	30
Dr. Nathan Coughlin	2	29
Very Nice Smile Dental	2	20
Dr. Kadish	2	11
Smile Influencers	2	11

Clinicians beat brands on video. 832 different channels show up, and the winners are hygienists and dentists explaining procedures in plain words. Shorts take 26% of the top-10 slots. Teeth Talk Girl alone appears in 26 of the 30 searches. YouTube is also the source Google's AI cites most for dental answers, so a practice that films its own dentist answering patient questions gets two shots at being seen.

WHO COMPETES FOR THE DENTAL PATIENT

COMPANY	WHAT THEY SELL	HOW THEY GET PATIENTS	STRENGTH	WEAK SPOT
Aspen Dental (The Aspen Group; also ClearChoice) About 1,100 US offices (DentistryIQ)	General care, dentures, implants	National brand, paid media, service pages that rank	In the top 10 on 28 of 150 pages, #1 on 8, cited in 19 AI answers	Trust: Reddit owns "is aspen dental good"; \$18.7M tracking-pixel class settlement (2025); \$2.3M California AG settlement (2026)
Regional chains (Western, Comfort, Gentle, Great Expressions, Jefferson, Tend)	General and family dentistry	Local pack, brand search	Many locations per metro	Only 10 of 420 "dentist" map results were recognizable chain brands
Affordable Dentures & Implants	Same-day dentures, extractions, implants; price list by office	Owns the "affordable dentures" results and map pack	Price-led, specialized	Narrow service line
Align Technology (Invisalign)	Clear aligners, sold through trained dentists and orthodontists	Brand demand: 368K searches a month	The brand patients ask for by name	Sells through the dentist, who still has to win the local search
Insurers (Delta Dental, MetLife, Cigna, Guardian, Humana)	Dental plans	Brand search plus "find a dentist" pages that rank for "dentist near me"	Delta Dental in the top 10 on 29 pages	Answers "is it covered", not "who should I see"
CareCredit	Healthcare credit card	Cost and financing content	16 result pages, 10 AI citations	A lender; Reddit talk is mixed
Zocdoc, Yelp, Opencare, 1-800-Dentist	Booking and directory listings	"best dentist near me" searches	Yelp 2.2% and Zocdoc 1.0% visibility	Patients still check Google reviews before booking
Clinics abroad (Mexico, Turkey)	Implants, crowns, veneers at lower prices	YouTube, Facebook, "dental implants mexico" (6.6K a month)	Price	Redo and repair stories on Reddit

What it takes to show up on the map

312

median Google reviews for a top-20 "dentist" map listing, 21 metros

415

median reviews for the top 3 in each metro (rating 4.9)

67%

of rated listings sit at 4.8 stars or higher (257 of 385)

10 OF 420

listings were recognizable chain brands

Sources: this study's DataForSEO Google Maps pull (21 metros x "dentist", 4 metros x "emergency dentist", top 20 each) and organic results; Aspen Dental settlements: DentistryIQ (July 29, 2025) and the California Attorney General (May 7, 2026).

WHITE SPACE NOBODY OWNS

1. REAL PRICES, POSTED

Cost and insurance is the biggest question topic on Google (269 questions), and "why is my root canal \$3,000?" shows on 6 result pages. Few practice pages state a price. A practice that posts ranges for cleanings without insurance, crowns, root canals and implants answers the first thing patients type.

2. A PLAN FOR THE 13% WITH NO COVERAGE

In 2023, 13% of people reported cost barriers to dental care (ADA HPI). In-house membership plans exist but barely show in search (DentalPlans.com appears on 1 of 150 pages). "dental insurance no waiting period" is one of the most forum-heavy results. A clearly priced yearly plan is a direct answer.

3. SAME-DAY CARE WITHOUT THE CALL CENTER

Emergency searches are crowded with lead-gen listings that route calls. Map packs show on half of them, and "dental er near me" is 27.1K searches a month at difficulty 11. A practice with real same-day slots, posted hours and an emergency visit price can take those patients.

4. THE FEAR-FIRST PRACTICE

Fear posts carry the highest intensity score (3.21) and 72.6% of adults report some fear. Sedation searches are up 30.5%. Patients search "best dentist for anxiety near me" and "sedation teeth cleaning near me". Few practices lead with it.

5. A SECOND OPINION PEOPLE TRUST

1,171 posts describe feeling upsold; 1,128 question posts ask if a quote is fair. A no-pressure plan review, with the X-rays explained and the alternatives priced, is what they are asking Reddit for.

6. ANSWERS THAT BEAT REDDIT

563 questions sit on 73 result pages where forums hold the top spots. A dentist-written answer with a short video can win the spot and the AI citation, since Google's AI cites YouTube more than any other source.

7. AFTER-CARE THAT ANSWERS "IS THIS NORMAL?"

12,865 posts come from people after a procedure, and dry socket alone accounts for 6,096. Day-by-day recovery pages, a text line and a quick check-in visit would keep those patients from asking strangers.

8. PROOF ON THE MAP

Star ratings no longer separate practices: two in three map listings are rated 4.8 or higher. Review count (median 312, top three 415), photos and posted prices do. A steady review routine is the cheapest way into the top three.

THE DENTAL PRACTICE LADDER

What a dental practice should build, from free content that earns trust to the big-ticket treatments that pay for it. Every rung is tied to the demand and gaps in this report. Prices are examples to test against the practice's own fees and local market, not recommendations.

FREE • REACH ANSWER EVERYTHING • Patient answer hub: cost, pain, fear, recovery FAQs with FAQ markup • Dentist-on-camera videos, embedded on each page • "What will it cost me?" pages and an insurance checker • Recovery guides, day by day	ENTRY • \$ BOOK A VISIT • New-patient exam and cleaning with a posted price • Same-day emergency visit with a posted price • Sedation and anxiety-friendly first visit • Online booking with real next-available times	RECURRING • \$\$ MEMBERSHIP PLAN • Cleanings, exams and X-rays for a flat fee • Discount on treatment and emergency visits • Built for the uninsured and the maxed-out • Monthly or yearly billing	BIG TICKET • \$\$\$ TREATMENT PLANS • Implants and All-on-4 (\$20.47 clicks) • Aligners and braces (\$10-12 clicks) • Crowns, veneers, bridges • Financing shown up front (\$17.72 clicks)	RETAIN • REFERRALS KEEP THEM • Free second-opinion plan review • After-care text line and check-ins • Recall reminders tied to benefits resets • Steady review requests after each visit
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90-day plan for a practice

WHEN	BUILD	WHY NOW
Weeks 1-3	Fix the Google Business Profile: services, hours, same-day and Saturday availability, insurance accepted, photos. Start a review request after every visit.	Map packs show on half of emergency and cosmetic searches; the top three in each metro had a median of 415 reviews.
Weeks 1-4	Price and coverage pages: cleaning without insurance, crown, root canal, extraction, implants, plus "which insurance we take" and payment options.	Cost and insurance is the top question topic (269 questions); 3.17M searches a month carry price or coverage words.
Weeks 2-6	Emergency landing page with same-day booking and an emergency visit price; "dentist open Saturday" and "dental er near me" pages.	Emergency clicks cost \$14.50; "dental er near me" is 27.1K a month at difficulty 11; lead-gen listings hold many of these results today.
Weeks 3-8	Patient answer hub: start with the forum-held questions (is deep cleaning necessary, are implants worth it, Invisalign vs braces, root canal vs extraction) and recovery guides.	73 of 150 result pages are held by forums; 12,865 Reddit posts come from people after a procedure.
Weeks 3-12	Dentist video: two short answers a week, filmed in the office, embedded on the matching page.	YouTube is cited in 52 of 117 AI answers; clinicians, not brands, win dental YouTube.
Weeks 6-10	Launch an in-house membership plan and a sedation-friendly first-visit offer.	13% have no dental coverage; fear posts carry the highest intensity; sedation searches are up 30.5%.
Weeks 8-12	Implant and aligner consult pages with financing and a free second-opinion plan review.	Implant clicks cost \$20.47; "financing dental implant" is \$26.78; demand for implants and financing climbs into January-March.

HOW THIS WAS BUILT

WORKSTREAM	WHAT WAS PULLED
Google demand	37 DataForSEO Labs keyword-suggestion requests and one keyword-overview request (33,797 rows), plus one Google Ads search-volume request for 54 head phrases. Filtered to 28,679 relevant US keywords in 15,309 groups, with volume, cost per click, difficulty, intent and 12 months of trend.
Google result pages	150 seed searches, US desktop, 20 results deep, with "People also ask" expanded and AI answers loaded. That gave 1,354 question slots and 1,073 unique questions. For 11 pages only the domains, questions and map listings were recorded.
YouTube and Maps	30 YouTube searches (2,112 videos, 832 channels). Google Maps: "dentist" in 21 metros and "emergency dentist" in 4, top 20 listings each (500 listings).
Reddit and autocomplete	143,232 public Reddit posts from 12 dental communities (r/askdentists, r/Invisalign, r/braces, r/wisdomteeth, r/Dentists, r/dentures, r/Teeth, r/orthodontics, r/TMJ, r/dental, r/DentalInsurance, r/DentalImplants), plus 11,823 top comments on the 1,500 most-discussed question threads, and 1,134 Google and 1,134 YouTube autocomplete lookups. Posts were classified by type, patient stage, topic and intensity. No usernames or personal data were stored.
Market and competitors	CDC, ADA Health Policy Institute, NADP, JADA (via ADA News), DentistryIQ and the California Attorney General, each cited where used.

Caveats

- Search volumes are Google Ads estimates rounded into buckets. "Click value" ranks where advertisers spend; it isn't a revenue forecast. Google returned no volume for 49 core head phrases (for example "emergency dentist", "root canal", "dentures"); their demand appears only through longer variants, so the biggest head terms are understated.
- 1,102 keywords had a single-month spike (most in September 2025) that was replaced with the keyword's median before seasonality was computed. Reported average volumes are left as Google gives them.
- Topic labels were assigned by keyword rules, so a small share are filed under the wrong topic. Share of visibility is weighted by rank, not by search volume, and the result pages were pulled with no city set, so map packs and local results reflect Google's default for a national search.
- Reddit posts were classified by rules, not read one by one, so treat counts as relative. The four largest communities hit the 25,000-post cap, so they cover roughly late 2024 to mid 2025 plus their all-time top posts; r/TMJ was included only for posts that mention teeth or dentists. Paraphrases summarize patterns; they are not quotes.
- Autocomplete came from Google's free suggest endpoint, which is not tied to a US location; it was briefly blocked mid-run and resumed later. Practice reviews were not pulled.
- Sleep apnea is covered in a separate report. Dentist-named sleep apnea searches total only about 550 a month in this data; the "sleep apnea dentist" result page shows dental sleep practices on the map and Reddit threads advising patients to see a sleep doctor first.
- This report describes what people search and say. It is not clinical advice.



CLICKFLAME

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